

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4303

INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SHUM BL

SUBJ: BENJAMIN MIGUEL AND HUMAN RIGHTS HEARING

REF: STATE 43612

1. BENJAMIN MIGUEL HARP, LAWYER, LEADER OF THE BOLIVIAN CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY WAS BORN IN LA PAZ IN 1926. ASIDE FROM HIS POLITICAL ACTIVITIES HE HAS BEEN A PRIVATE LAWYER, PROFESSOR OF LAW AND THEN DEAN OF THE LAW FACULTY AT THE SAN ANDRES UNIVERSITY IN LA PAZ AND HELD SEVERAL OFFICIAL AND SEMI-OFFICIAL POSITIONS UNDER VARIOUS BOLIVIAN GOVERNMENTS. HE WAS A LEADER GRANTEE TO US IN 1966. MIGUEL IS A MODERATE LEFTIST (BY BOLIVIAN STANDARDS) AND A CHRONIC CRITIC OF EVERY BOLIVIAN GOVERNMENT SINCE THE 1960'S. HE WAS EXILED BY THE BANZER GOVERNMENT IN MAY, 1974 FOR HIS ROLE IN FORMING AN ANTI-GOVERNMENT COALITION OF LEFTIST PARTIES.

2. MIGUEL WAS ONE OF TWO FOUNDERS OF THE BOLIVIAN SOCIAL CHRISTIAN PARTY (PSC) IN 1954. FROM 1962 TO 1964 HE WAS A NATIONAL DEPUTY AND PSC VICE-PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE BEFORE THE PARTY DECIDED TO ABSTAIN FROM PARTICIPATING IN THE MAY 1964 ELECTIONS.

3. MIGUEL WAS ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY

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(PDC) IN AUGUST 1969, AND BECAME THE PARTY'S CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT IN ELECTIONS SCHEDULED FOR 1970. HE BLAMED US IMPERIALISM FOR BOLIVIAN AND THIRD WORLD UNDERDEVELOPMENT, ALLEGEDLY CONDONED THE USE OF VIOLENCE AS A MEANS OF "LIBERATING" THE LATIN AMERICAN PEOPLES, AND CALLED FOR THE NATIONALIZATION OF GULF OIL PROPERTIES AND THE US-OWNED MINA MATHILDE.

4. MIGUEL WAS A STRONG CRITIC OF THE LEFTIST REGIM OF JUAN JOSE TORRES IN 1970-71 AND ALSO HAS LOUDLY CRITICIZED THE CURRENT BANZER GOVERNMENT, ESPECIALLY FOR ITS ECONOMIC POLICIES. HE WAS ARRESTED IN OCTOBER 1973 AND AGAIN IN JANUARY 1974 BEFORE BEING EXILED IN MAY 1974.

5. MIGUEL PRESENTLY RESIDES IN CARACAS, ALLEGEDLY REPRESENTS THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY IN AN "ALLIANCE" OF ANTI-GOB EXILE GROUPS OF BOTH MODERATE AND EXTREME LEFT NATURE. MIGUEL IS REPORTED TO BE ONE OF THE MORE MODERATE MEMBERS OF THIS GROUPING.

6. EMBASSY COMMENT: AS DEPARTMENT AWARE, THE GOB HAS BEEN CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT POLICIES THE NEW CARTER ADMINISTRATION WOULD ADOPT TOWARD BOLIVIA'S MILITARY GOVERNMENT AND ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN BOLIVIA, AND THERE HAS BEEN A SPATE OF FALSE RUMORS THAT VARIOUS BOLIVIAN EXILE LEADERS HAD BEEN INVITED BY THE ADMINISTRATION OR THE CONGRESS TO DISCUSS HUMAN RIGHTS IN BOLIVIA. THE VISIT BY BENJAMIN MIGUEL IS LIKELY TO CREATE A FURTHER ROUND OF RUMORS AND ATTRACT THE ATTENTION OF THE GOB. EMBASSY WOULD THEREFORE APPRECIATE DEPARTMENT'S ADVICIE ASAP ON WHETHER MIGUEL WILL BE LIKELY TO BE ABLE TO INCLUDE IN HIS TESTIMONY MATTERS ON BOLIVIA. WOULD ALSO APPRECIATE BEING INFORMED AS TO WHAT SUBJECTS WERE ACTUALLY COVERED AFTER TESTIMONY.

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Message Attributes

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Disposition Approved on Date:
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